

CHAPTER 1

COMPOSITION OF HOUSEHOLDS IN SOME FANTE COMMUNITIES

A study of the frameworks of social integration

EMILE V.W. VERCRUIJSSE*
in cooperation withLYDI M. VERCRUIJSSE-DOPHEIDE
and
KWESI J.A. BOAKYE

The theme of the present study was suggested to us by some of the problems that we encountered while conducting a survey of occupational differentiation in 17 villages, comprising more than 1100 respondents in the Fante area.

In making the research design for this study, the question arose whether the economically active members of the community can be considered as earning their income on behalf of a group of dependants, the composition of which is relatively uniform for all occupations and all strata. Of course, this question originated in the limited social experience of the investigators, which made them expect that economically active people in general will be males, between 20 and 65, who earn an income for their wife and children. The cases in which the groups of dependants are composed differently — no wife; one of the grand-parents, a grandchild, no husband with the wife earning, etc., can be easily conceived of as exceptions to this rule. This is even true for those cases in which the wife too is an earner of income, because mostly she is only economically active in certain periods of her married life and more often than not her income is seen to be additional and not essential for the family. It is often considered to be not more than a supplement.

* Professor E.V.W. Vercruijsse, formerly head of the Social Studies Project, University of Cape Coast, is Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

One of the reasons why this model is useless in guiding the social scientist in studying West African societies is exactly that women are economically active in their own right as much as the men are and that this is not affected by being married and having children. Accordingly their income does not have the character of a supplement and cannot even be conceived as being part of the "family income".

As a consequence, male as well as female respondents in the above mentioned survey were not interviewed as representing some uniform kind of spending unit for whom they were earning an income, but as individually independent persons, engaged in economic activities in their own right. This amounts to saying that both husbands and wives were interviewed with exactly the same questionnaire on their economic activities, on the extent to which they had entered into co-operation with others and on the network of economic transactions within which they moved as an outflow of their activities. It also means that dealings between husband and wife were conceived as economic transactions between economic units and not as the non-economic interactions within the family, no matter whether these transactions were obligatory (e.g. because of having children together or non-obligatory.)

The other reason is that the Fantes are not integrated in their community through one uniform, complex, multi-dimensional and multi-functional framework like the nuclear family, which is a type of group that has great integrational power, because the members of this group perform quite a number of functions only for each other and not for outsiders. The income earned by some members is spent on the needs of all members; provisions are bought for the group and consumed by the group collectively; the members of the group cook, eat, sleep and spend most of their leisure time together; they belong to an integrated system of authority and of mutual obligations.

In designing the above mentioned survey it was realised that the model of such an integrational framework could not be postulated for the Fante-communities for basing research questions on and

accordingly that the answers could not be possibly interpreted on the assumption that such a framework is present. Nevertheless, the analysis of the data would be facilitated if the existence could be assumed of some group structures, intermediate between the individuals as economic agents and the village community of which they are members. It is most desirable, especially for statistical purposes, that such structures will be easy to delineate, that membership of them can be simply ascertained and that their meaning can be quickly understood. It is for those reasons that for the purposes of the survey a "household" was defined as the collectivity of people sleeping under the same roof. On the basis of preliminary observations and interviews this feature of social life was assumed to be less transient than many of the others. Although it was realized that the units in which people meet for the satisfaction of other needs are less uniform and more changing, such "sleeping" - collectives were nevertheless supposed to be the nuclei for integration of many other activities.

When after the interviewing had been completed, a post-survey observation programme -- mainly for checking the reliability of the survey data and for acquiring background information for interpreting them -- was instituted in one of the sample villages (namely a fishing village, Ampanye, in the Komenda district) the latter assumption, namely that the people, sleeping under one roof form a "household" and that this unit is also the focus for the integration of other activities, became more and more untenable. To continue to refer to them as "households" would grossly over-state their functional significance. It seems much better to term them "residential units" or "dwelling units".

Basic units appeared to be much smaller than assumed and not to be very strong foci of integration. Moreover, if fulfilling different functions, they might not fulfil these for the same member. Although considerable overlap was observed, the impression was gained that this was significantly lower than one.

In view of the fact that the same problem is likely to turn up in other studies, it was deemed

useful to investigate the frameworks of social integration that occur in Fante communities.

Method of the Study

Because the situation we had come across in Ampanye was expected to be quite different from the one in agricultural inland villages, such a village, namely Old Ebu in the Asebu area, was included in the study. As it could also be expected that urbanisation has effected considerable changes in social organisation, Cape Coast was also included.

In each of these population centres a number of dwelling units ("dwelling unit" again meaning: a collectivity of people sleeping under the same roof) were carefully studied by means of observation and of extensive interviews with one or more of its members. The dwelling units were not randomly selected and accordingly do not form representative examples. They were, on the contrary, chosen in such a way that they reflect at least some of the major socio-economic differences which occur.

In collecting the data the following interview schedule was used. As will be seen it does not have the character of a questionnaire, but is really nothing but a systematic list of the pertinent questions that are to guide the fieldworker:

Interview Schedule

1. Draw a plan of the house, with indications of the different living units (i.e. separate doors with locks) kitchens, rooms.

Who owns the house? Does the owner live here himself or not?

What is the relation between the owner and the persons living here?

- if relatives: in the male or the female line?
- if not : is rent being paid?

(These questions aim at establishing the basis on which people are using the house, or their part of it - be it kitchen, only for cooking and eating - or be it also a room for sleeping.

If only a kitchen: where do they sleep?)

2. For all of the people making use of this house, in one way or the other, we have to find out:
 - (a) in what combinations they cook and eat together.
 - (b) do they also buy foodstuffs etc. in this combination or not?
 - (c) do they also earn a livelihood in this combination, or not?
 - (d) in what way do they earn their livelihood? See under no.4
 - (e) in what combinations do they sleep?
 - (f) in what combinations do they spend their leisure-time (sitting and talking together). And, even if they cook separately, do they do this in the same courtyard, or in front of the same house?
 - (g) in what combinations do they belong under the same authority? Who is in authority over them? In what situations does he/she have to make his/her authority felt? What sanctions are used under such circumstances? Under whose authority is the one who is in charge in this unit?
 - (h) what obligations do people have towards what other people?
Is the obligation to bring up children and to take care of them among these obligations? Under what circumstances (e.g. poverty) are such obligations not followed? For what reasons do obligations come to an end? What obligations have others towards them?
 - (i) to what extent do people from different units share anything they bring in, such as fish, farm produce or things bought? Do people buy things for themselves? Of what type are these? For all these ways in which people combine, it should be established whether they are relatives or not and in what way.
3. As far as authority and obligations (especially in the field of education) are concerned, it should be found out to what extent these stretch beyond the group living under the same

roof.

4. Description of the economic activities of the people concerned.

The fieldwork was carried out from May until August 1970 and as far as Old Ebu is concerned, partly in October. The Ampanye-study was conducted by the author with the assistance of Mrs. Vercruijse and of Mr. Boakye. The Cape Coast data were exclusively collected by Mr. Boakye, who also started the fieldwork in Old Ebu. In the latter village data collections was completed by Mr. A.N. Abaidoo.

While the data were being analysed it became apparent that comparable data were available for the households of academic graduates from a study with a quite different focus that is being conducted by the second author among the lecturers of the University College of Cape Coast. For the purpose of comparison these data, as far as they are concerned with respondents of Akan origin, have been included in the analysis.

The Main Findings

The data do indeed support the initial observations made in Ampanye and show that:

1. within the dwelling units the main functions, such as sleeping, earning a living, cooking (spending) and eating are performed within a multitude of much smaller units;
2. the average size of these basic units is about 3, with nearly half of them consisting of one person only;
3. with regard to their composition the compound basic units, i.e. the basic units that consist of more than one person, belong either to a patrilocal-nuclear family type or to a matriloc-local-matrilineal type;
4. there is no doubt that compound basic units are foci for the integration of functions. This does not mean, however, that they integrate in

a way and to an extent similar to the nuclear family in Western society;

5. the coherence between the basic units within the dwelling unit (and also within the lineage and the clan) is weaker than many would like to suggest and of secondary importance.

Conclusion 1:

In the three localities we studied 32 dwelling units in all comprising 407 persons. In size they range from 1 to 60 members, with an average of 13. Within these 32 dwelling units we looked for the combinations of persons who together perform one of the basic functions, such as: sleeping, earning a livelihood, cooking, eating. These uni-functional units were distinguished on the basis of the following criteria:

Sleeping unit = a person or a group of persons sleeping in one or more rooms behind one and the same locked door;

earning unit = a person or a group of persons who together engage in one or more economic activities with a view to produce or earn for common spending;

cooking unit = a person or a group of persons who contribute money or foodstuffs for the preparation of their meals;

eating unit = a person or a group of persons who either eat from one and the same bowl or otherwise eat usually in each others company

Of these basic functional units so defined we found the following numbers within the 32 dwelling units (see Table 1):

TABLE I

	Number	Average size
dwelling units	32	13
sleeping units	150	2.7
cooking units	127	3.2
eating units	142	2.9
earning units	194	*

* The average sizes of the other units have been calculated on the basis of the 407 members of the 32 dwelling units. To do this in the same way for the earning units would not make much sense. About their size we can, however, say that of the 194 units 186 consist of one person only, while the other 8 consist of two persons

Conclusion 2:

From table 1 we can also see that the average size of the basic units range from 2.7 to 3.2, which allows us to conclude that they number 3 persons on the average.

We hasten to add, however, that this average resulted from a quite skewed distribution as nearly half of the sleeping units - 49% to be exact - are single person units. Consequently, the average size of the remaining compound units is about 4 instead of 3. Moreover, the variation in size of these compound units between the three localities is fairly big, ranging from 2 for Ampanye to more than 5 for Cape Coast. If nevertheless we find it meaningful to discuss the average size of the basic units, it is mainly because it allows us to stress the fact that in moving the analysis from 'dwelling unit' to 'uni-functional unit' we meet with social life at a significantly smaller scale.

Conclusion 3:

In scanning through the composition of the basic units -- so as not to complicate matters too much we will restrict ourselves here to the 'sleeping units' it immediately strikes the eye that they can be grouped into three main types, viz.:

- a. patrilocal-nuclear family units: a male head with his wife and often their children;
- b. matrilocal-matrilineal units: a female head with her daughter(s), and/or granddaughter(s) and often their children;
- c. single person units.

Among the 150 sleeping units we detected only 3 exceptions which, at first view, do not fit into this typology. They consist of a father with his sons, who either sleep together or sleep in separate rooms (behind their own locked door), and who eat jointly or separately from the food that is cooked by their father's wife (who may or may not be their mother). At second view, however, these few exceptions are only variations of the case where the sons are living in their father's house in their own rooms (behind their own locked doors) and eat separately the food that is cooked for them by their own wives -- a situation in which the sons have altogether severed all links with their father's (and mother's) basic units. Accordingly, the exceptions may be viewed as stages in the development of an unmarried, adult man towards the mature stage in which he leads an independent life. Or, alternatively, as far as sleeping of adult men in the room of their father is concerned: a deviation from the ideal, caused by the lack of resources for building bigger houses with extra rooms.

If there is anything that the above discussion of the exceptional cases being out, it is an important structural feature of Fante society, namely that adult males when residing under one roof hardly ever cooperate in the performance of any of the basic functions, while the women-folk under the

same conditions live less individualised lives and commonly sleep, cook, eat and even occasionally earn together.

We have already mentioned that the 'single person unit' (type c.) is the most frequent one, accounting for 49% of the sleeping units. Of the remainder a full two-thirds (69%) are of the 'patrilocal-nuclear family' - type (a), and only one-third of the 'matrilocal-matrilineal' variety (type b.).

The use of the term 'nuclear family' should go with a warning that we are only discussing sleeping units: in a number of cases where the data show the wife as cooking her husband's (and son's) meals in the house of her own lineage we nevertheless grouped them under type a., because she was said to have her regular sleeping place with her husband. On the other hand, she was not counted to be a member of her husband's sleeping unit if she would only come and sleep with him from time to time or if she happened to be on shift with a second wife. As an after thought we would like to add to this warning that the sleeping units of types a. and b. may occasionally include other kinfolk; this, of course, does not alter their place in the typology. The common situation, however, is one where people who are otherwise related to the head of the household than the ones mentioned in the typology, in case they reside under the same roof, form separate sleeping units.

Conclusion 4:

One of the original notions of this study was, as we have explained, that basic functions such as sleeping, cooking, eating and earning are not being carried out within one and the same basic unit. Although it was expected that these uni-functional basic units would overlap to a considerable extent, their overlapping was hypothesised to be significantly lower than one. In looking at our data, it may now seem that this formulation is clearly overstating the case, because we can think of an

interpretation of the evidence that assumes the common occurrence of multi-functionality. This interpretation would read as follows:

It may be true that within the same dwelling units there are more sleeping units (150) than cooking units (127) and many more earning units (194), but this may be accounted for in the following way:

- (1) the cooking pot and the women who cook are the integrative core for other functions, such that combining for cooking (=common house-holding) also means in many cases: the joining together of a number of different sleeping units as well as of a number of earning units.
- (2) the fact that more than one earning unit is contributing towards common householding -- if 194 contribute towards 127 cooking units that amounts to an average of 1.5 earners for every household - could also occur in a society where the nuclear family prevails and where adult unmarried children as well as working mothers add to the family income.
- (3) if there are 23 more sleeping units than cooking units this might just be because some household groups have bigger houses with more separate rooms so that they have the luxury of dividing themselves up for sleeping in smaller groups. If this interpretation were right, the fact that people sleep in separate rooms does not mean that a bigger group breaks up into smaller units, they just do it for convenience sake, while their common solidarity resides firmly in the cooking pot.

However, as soon as we analyse the data in more detail, we see that this simple interpretation is not really adequate (see table 2). We find that it is possible to distinguish the following groups:

- (a) 48 single person sleeping units, forming nearly one-third (32%) of the total. They coincide with earning as well as with cooking (eating) units, or, put differently, we have to do with 48 persons who live their own lives, earn their own living and cook in their own pots
- (b) 12 compound cooking units to which 26 units contribute and which combine around their cooking pots 37 separate sleeping units of which 25 are single person units;
- (c) 64 compound units that coincide with cooking units to which 116 earning units contribute. After all only the cooking units of this group relate to more than one earning unit, the ratio being $116/64 (= 1.8)$ or nearly 2.

TABLE 2

Sleeping units	Cooking units	Earning units
48 single person	48	48
14 single person	12 (compound)	14
11 single person		--
12 compound		12
64 compound	64	64
1 compound	3	4
150	127	194

The occurrence of these groups can be interpreted as follows:

With regard to the 48 single units: 37 (77%) of these were observed in Cape Coast, where they form 15% of the total sample ($N=252$). The remaining 11 live in Ampanye or Old Ebu and form only 7% of the sample from those villages ($N=77+78=155$).

Apart from the fact that the incidence of the single person household unit is to a very great extent an urban phenomenon, it is also mainly due to the presence of tenants, viz. 37, of which 34 live in Cape Coast. It will amaze nobody that here we have to do mostly with young male migrants, who after finishing school, went to the city in search of employment.

With regard to the 25 single person sleeping units that combined with 12 compound units into common cooking units, it strikes us that most of these single persons are young unmarried adults: 20 out of the 25 are either sons, daughters, nephews or nieces of the head of household. All these youngsters are in one or another stage of withdrawing themselves from the compound unit to which they are now attached:

- (6) have only got so far as having acquired a separate room with a locked door, but do not earn their own living yet;
- (14) have gone on beyond this stage. They also earn their own living, but still join their unit of origin for meals. The next step for them will be to marry and - if they would go on to sleep where they do now -- they would enter into household relationships with other units (persons).

The 5 remaining single persons who sleep in their own rooms, but do not earn their own living and eat from a compound unit's cooking pot are in the opposite stage of their lives: they are too old to work and are fed by their daughters or nieces.

With regard to the 64 compound units, these have entered into exactly this next stage. If they are compound units it is just for this reason that the heads of the households have married and begotten offspring, so that they have either formed 'nuclear family' -- type groups or groups of the 'mother-daughter-granddaughter' - type.

(As it is, we came across one exceptional sleeping unit which consisted of three completely separate cooking units. We intend to leave this one case outside the discussion.)

It is true that we will seem to be presenting a picture that may in every respect make sense within a Western context: the compound unit happens to be the 'standard' case, while single person units are either a case of single male migrants who live far away from their family of origin, or of single persons who are only partly independent of that family, either because being young they have not yet formed their own compound unit, or because being old they have lost their own unit and had to give up part of their independence. We think, however, that there are quite a number of significant differences which should now be brought out more specifically.

First: quite a number of the compound units, viz. 24 of the 77 or 31%, are of the matrilocal-matrilineal type that one would in vain look for in Western society.

Secondly: acquiring a room of your own with a locked door means a greater amount of independence than having your own bedroom in your parents house. It means having your own possessions, going your own way, having to account for very little of what you do to others. The fact of the locked door puts an emphasis on the independence which you gain in this way. Moreover, the importance of sleeping separately is stressed by the low integrative content of combining for cooking and eating (see the next point).

Thirdly: we cannot possibly put too much emphasis on the fact that every conceivable person earns his (her) own living and that only a part of what each person produces or earns is contributed for common householding. Or to put it differently, if you can earn your own living, you only join others to the extent that you are interested in having one woman (a pair of women) cook for you. All your other expenses do not enter into the arrangement, so that

the use of the term 'household' can hardly be defended. In this sense the combining for cooking integrates individuals only in a relatively weak way.

Fourthly: the fact that people join resources for cooking does not at all mean that they eat their meal in each others company. According to our data there were 142 eating units to 127 cooking units, which would amount to a functional overlap of 89%. We feel, however, that this figure might be a systematic underestimation of the extent to which people eat their meals separately. It is so common for a Fante to take his bowl where he fancies that it is difficult for a respondent to figure what 'eating together' would really mean.

Fifthly: if we speak of 'fulfilling some function together' that does not necessarily mean that the members of the functional group really meet in one place for its fulfilment. Quite frequently people who join for sleeping disperse for cooking and eating or the reverse. At mealtimes we see girls crossing over to their father's house with his food, while another night we might see the father move to his wife's kitchen to join the meal. We also see in the evening women moving to their spouses' houses to join them for the night and returning to their mothers' houses the next morning to attend to some household chores.

It appears that we meet with three different cases of "spatial dispersion" of functions, viz.

- a member of your sleeping unit does the cooking, but she does it elsewhere;
- a member of another sleeping unit joins you daily for cooking and eating. There were no male cases under this heading.
- a member of another sleeping unit does your cooking elsewhere.

According to our data there are 28 out of the 150 sleeping units where such 'spatial dispersion' of functions occurs, or 19%.

The Coherence of the Dwelling Units

There is no doubt that in the main the members of the dwelling units are related to each other on the basis of kinship. True, 45 out of the 150 sleeping units (=30%) are tenant households but 41 of these occur in Cape Coast, showing how predominant the kin-based dwelling unit still is in the rural area. Moreover, among the dwelling units in Cape Coast containing tenant sleeping units, there is none which does not also contain two or more sleeping units that are bound together by bonds of kinship. This might lead us to the question: "Bonds of what types?"

This is a question that anthropologists have often posed themselves and to which they have been able to give much better answers in the last 20 years. We are here referring to the acceptance of statistical (that is, of census and survey) methods in collecting and analysing data on aspects of social structure, such as domestic organisation, and the maturing of the idea that it is fallacious to analyse the alignments of residence in terms of discrete types, as these so-called types are in fact phases in a developmental cycle (see among others Fortes, 1949, Goodenough, 1956, Goody, 1958).

However, we are not going to attempt an answer to the question here. We will treat it in a separate paper, in which -- working along the lines of Fortes's "Time and Social Structure" -- we will study the domestic organization of a number of Fante, Ewe and Dagomba villages in a comparative way (see Vercautjes, 1971). If we mention this approach here at all, it is because there is a tendency to overrate the importance of the kinship bonds between the basic units within a dwelling unit. True, Fortes (1949) acknowledges the fact that "The dwelling group does not, as a rule, have a common food-supply nor do its members pool their incomes for the common support." However, he immediately qualifies this statement by adding "But the norm is for the dwelling group to consist of a household in

the social sense, that is, group in which the rule holds that food and assistance are freely asked and given between members" (p.64).

It should be granted that if we did not find anything of the kind in Fante communities more than 20 years after Fortes conducted his Ashanti-survey, this could be due to a combination of initial differences between the Fante and the Ashanti in conjunction with changes that occurred over the last 20 years. In view of the fact, however, that the Fante communities we studied do not in any other respect differ fundamentally from the Ashanti communities as Fortes pictured them, such an assumption is hard to swallow. We feel therefore justified to suggest that Fortes in characterising the dwelling unit as "a household in the social sense" was not so much basing this on specific evidence, such as are presented in this paper, but on the general premise that kinship bonds are likely to have social and economic implications and on the frequent invocation of the rule that food and assistance will be freely asked and given.

Although there is hardly any Fante who would deny the existence of such a rule in a general sense, this does not say much about the specific conditions of its application nor about the stringency with which it is enforced. Anyhow, the verbal adherence to the rule appears not to preclude the fact that all our respondents -- when specifically questioned about this -- have denied that there would ever be any food, cooked or uncooked, given by one of the units to the members of another unit anymore than that they would buy or prepare or eat any food together. The only exception seems to be the sharing of meat at the occasion of the slaughtering of a goat and the feeding by a woman of her sister's children living within the same compound.

As far as we have been able to establish, the coherence between the basic units within one and the same dwelling unit was restricted to a minimal amount of authority which the 'household head' exercises over all the inmates and the informal

coherence which is brought about by spending most of the non-working hours together in the same courtyard or on the same doorstep.

No doubt the bonds which result from these informal meetings, which at times may fill long hours, are of considerable importance. It is to be expected, however, that closer study would reveal a fleeting system of subgroup formation, rather than the forging of a strong common solidarity based on the fact of living under one and the same roof. To this should be added that people are not forced to spend their non-working hours on the doorstep of their own dwelling house and are frequently seen moving around to other places for meeting friends.

With regard to the common authority of the 'head of the household', which we have already called 'minimal', we can be brief. This authority allows the household head to take educational measures regarding any child in the dwelling unit if he/she deems this necessary, but mostly if she is requested to do so by the parents or the guardian of the child. The only other situation in which the authority over the inmates is activated is when members (notably spouses) quarrel. The household head may force them to refrain from violent behaviour and to accept his mediation or, if this should not work, that of the lineage head. And even in these respects the household head's authority in most of the Cape Coast dwelling units would not be very effective.

The conclusion from these considerations seems to be that no strong bonds of a more formal or objective nature are there to bind the members of one dwelling unit together across the boundaries of different basic units. The fact that they are very often members of the same lineage does not alter this situation in any significant way. In accepting this conclusion one may still feel convinced that it does not say much about the social and economic functions of kinship relations in Fante society because these might specifically create rights and obligations between members of different dwelling units much more so than between kin who happen to reside together. It is difficult to see why this would be so -- why would the people who own houses

have a preference for residing with those members of their lineage with whom they are the least concerned? -- but we found it worthwhile to investigate. Accordingly we questioned our informants on their obligations towards peoples outside their dwelling unit. The next section is an attempt to summarise the results.

Obligations between Members of different Dwelling Units

There do indeed exist kinship relationships of a more obligatory nature that integrate members of different dwelling units. The most common among these is the obligation of the uncle (mother's brother) to look after his nephews and nieces (the children of his sister.) The question here is not so much whether this obligation is acknowledged in a general way -- which it is -- but how strongly it is felt, how much it is fulfilled and to what extent it really is an obligation.

In Old Ebu, more instances of this relationship between mother's brother and sister's children were reported than in either Ampanye or Cape Coast. However, even there it was stressed by a number of respondents that the first obligation of a man is towards his own wife and children and that, in addition, he may look after his sister's children. In Ampanye the formulations are even more outspoken. Some respondents state that "we on the coast" do not put the uncle under any specific obligation. All there is to this relationship, they say, is that if the sister and her husband do not bring up their children properly, the uncle may try to put them right. As proof of the absence of a real obligation they point to the fact that in those cases where a complaint is made to the chief about parents neglecting their children, the chief will call the father and mother (and not the uncle!) and point out their duties to them. Moreover, if a man dies, the obligation to care for his children is on his own brother(s) and not on the mother's brother(s).

There is some amount of contradiction between these statements and the fact that we find some uncles in Ampanye taking care of their sister's children. We came across one informant who, in total, looked after six nephews and nieces. At present, he

said, there are still two of them in Ampanye . The expenses for food and clothing for one of these he is regularly paying. For the other he has no expenses, because the father put the girl in school himself and looks after her. This seems very much to point to the fact that there is no obligation as long as the father can look after his children himself, and that if he cannot the uncle may step in. Whether he will do this or not seems to be dependent on certain conditions, all of which we have not been able to discover. All respondents agree about this that there is no expectation toward help from the uncle if a nephew or a niece does not live in the same community. If they did live there and he was looking after them, his obligation comes to an end the moment they leave. The same occurs when they come of age. In quite a number of cases respondents acknowledged the existence of an obligation, but claimed that the circumstances of poverty in which they were living -- and the circumstances could not be called differently -- prevented them from fulfilling these.

In Cape Coast we did not come across many cases of uncles looking after some of their nephews or nieces. A relationship, of which a few instances were noted in Ampanye, but that occurred far more often in the Cape Coast data is the one where the grandmother looks after her daughter's daughter(s). It should, however, be stressed that in all these cases the granddaughters were living in with the grandmother and did some household chores in exchange for being fed, clothed and educated.

There were a few cases of married sons occasionally giving some foodstuffs to their old aged mother. We heard, however, many complaints of mothers that their sons did not give them any help. They talked about this as about a traditional obligation, that is no longer acknowledged by the younger generation.

It struck us that in Ampanye in quite a number of cases uncles owning houses gave their nephews and their families housing without pay, while for the

nephews no obligation whatsoever seemed to arise from this. In one case where the old aged uncle was unable to move, he was never offered any food by his nephews or their wives. Every day an out-living niece came to bring him food.

References

- Fortes M. 1949 "Time and Social Structure: An Ashanti Case Study," in Social Structure. Studies presented to A.R. Radcliff-Brown. (Ed.)
- Goodenough W.H. 1956 "Residence Rules," in South western Journal of Anthropology, 12,22-38.
- Goody J. 1958 (Ed.) "The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups," Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology, No.1.
- Vercruijsse E.V.W. 1971 in cooperation with L.M. Vercruijsse-Dopheide, A Comparative Study of the Composition of Residential Units among the Fante, the Ewe and the Dagomba. Unpublished.



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial - NoDerivs 4.0 License.

To view a copy of the license please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

This is a download from the BLDS Digital Library on OpenDocs
<http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/>